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## **GRT** VOICES OF MARGINALIZED WOMEN IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S PLAY KAMALA

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**Abstract:-** Marginalization is the social process of being relegated to the fringes or margins of society. One such example of marginalization is the marginalization of women in patriarchal society where women are never regarded as autonomous beings. Subjugation and marginalization are the vital factors in their lives. This paper is an attempt to explore the voices of marginalized women in Vijay Tendulkar's play *Kamala*. Vijay Tendulkar is one of the great Indian dramatists of the twentieth century. He is the most influential Marathi dramatist who has gained international recognition. Many of his plays have derived inspiration from real-life incidents or social upheavals, which provide clear light on harsh realities. As a social realist, he clearly brings out the prevailing inequality between the genders in Indian society. In *Kamala*, he pictures women as victims of patriarchal society and draws our attention to their exploitation, discrimination and commodification. He presents the dark side of humanity by exposing the 'flesh market' and the 'marriage system' in India. Jaisingh, a self-seeking journalist and a dominant husband, is at the centre of the play. He marginalizes all the three female characters in the play. Through the voices of these marginalized women Tendulkar poses the question of women's status in Indian society.

**Keywords:** women, voices, marginalization, exploitation, patriarchy, victims.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Vijay Tendulkar, a journalist, novelist, short story writer and a radical dramatist in modern Marathi literature has made a mark as a profile playwright with twenty-eight plays, twenty-four one-act plays and eleven children's plays. Many of his plays with innovative themes have been proven to be Marathi theatre classics. They have been translated into English and many Indian languages, highlighting his modernist vision in modern Indian drama. With his plays Marathi drama has reached on the international map. His play *Kamala* (1981) is a realistic play. It is inspired by a real-life incident--the *Indian Express* expose by the reporter, Ashwin Sarin, who actually bought a girl from a rural flesh market and presented her at a press conference in New Delhi to expose the brutal exploitation of women that exists in rural India. However, the play does not merely present the moral degradation of modern investigative and sensational journalism but it also presents the burning issue of modern India – the marginalized condition of women in free India. Even today the condition and status of women remains secondary. She is considered a weaker sex and is exploited by the male society whether she is educated or illiterate. Beauvoir holds social conditioning responsible for the othering of women in patriarchy and argues that while sex is biological, gender is social construct: "one is not born a woman, rather becomes a woman". (295).

This paper is an attempt to explore the voices of marginalized women in Vijay Tendulkar's play, *Kamala*. Marginalization is the social process of being relegated to the fringes or margins of society. One such example of marginalization is the marginalization of women in patriarchal society where women are never regarded as autonomous beings. Subjugation and marginalization are the vital factors in their lives. The male-dominated society never gives women a chance to voice her feelings in the house or in society. Her role remains within the house as an ideal house wife to cook, to rear the children and to be obedient to her husband. She is still living in a cage-like

situation at home and these very facts of women community are explored by Tendulkar in his play, *Kamala*.

Jaisingh Jadhav, a dominant, self-seeking journalist is at the centre of the play. All the three characters in the play—Kamala, Sarita and Kamalabai—are in some way or the other subjugated by him. Jaisingh purchases Kamala from the flesh market of Luhardaga in Bihar to present her in the press conference to get promotion in his job and reputation in his professional life. Kamala, who is an illiterate tribal woman is not aware of her own status. She thinks that her duty is to serve her master. She is doubly exploited. Being a tribal woman she is exploited by the upper class people in society and being a woman she is sexually exploited by men. In her view the only relation between man and woman is master and slave. She thinks that Sarita and Kamalabai both have been bought by Jaisingh and like her they are also slaves of him. Jaisingh treats her only as an object. He wants to expose 'the open auction of women in Modern India' by presenting Kamala in the press conference only to get promotion in his job and reputation in the field of journalism. He seems to be a man of false principles. He just makes show of the principles of equality and freedom for women, but inwardly he does not have any sympathy for women. His behaviour with Kamala shows his callous attitude towards her. He seems to be a man without any feelings and morals. He doesn't allow her to have a bath and even to change the saree. He prevents his wife, Sarita to lend a Sari to Kamala. He presents her in the conference in the torn saree. In the conference all the reporters make fun of Kamala and torture her by asking her odd questions related to sex which she doesn't understand. Even at home he and his friend, Jain make fun of Kamala by making derogatory comments on her exposure in the conference. Kamala's voice has been marginalized. Jaisingh's indifferent and callous attitude to women is found, when he says,

"What's so unusual about the Luhardaga flesh market? Women are sold in many places like that, all over the country. How do you think all the red-light district could operate—without that? That's not the point. The point is how we project Luhardaga—the technique of it. The art lies in presenting the case--- not in the case itself!" (Tendulkar 15). He leaves Kamala in the orphanage, when his aim of presenting in the conference is fulfilled. He never stops to think what will happen to Kamala after her exposure in the press conference. He has no sympathy for her.

Like Kamala, Sarita is also an object in Jadhav's life, an object that provides physical enjoyment, social companionship and domestic comfort. Jaisingh is a traditional husband who dominates his wife, Sarita at home. He talks about equality, freedom of woman but he does not follow these. He likes that his wife should perform the role of ideal Indian house wife, obedient wife. Sarita is an educated woman but she is not aware of her exploitation and secondary status at home. She is a typical Indian wife who serves her husband obediently. She doesn't want to do anything which he doesn't like or which will make him angry. She performs the role of ideal wife as she notes down all his phone calls if he is not present, prepares delicious meals for him. She is so docile that Jaisingh's friend Jain calls her "Lovely bonded Labourer" and this very phrase indicates a lot about Jaisingh's treatment of his wife. Before Kamala's entry in her house she is a silent woman. She does not find any fault in being a docile or obedient wife. She wants to make her husband happy any way though at times he behaves rudely with her. Not only Kamala is purchased from illegal auction at Luhardaga but Sarita is also purchased legally through marriage transactions. The institution called marriage has given the authority to Jaisingh to dominate Sarita. So when Sarita reacts against sending kamala to orphanage Jaisingh reminds her –

"It's I who takes decisions in this house, and no one else. Do you understand?" (Tendulkar 42). Her likes, dislikes and opinions are never taken into consideration by Jaisingh. But the entry of Kamala in the house awakens her conscience. It is illiterate Kamala, who makes her see where she stands. Her conversation with Kamala makes her aware of her own condition at home.

Kamala – How much did he buy you for?

Sarita – what?

Kamala – I said, how much did he buy you for?

Sarita – (Recovering) Me? Look here Kamala (Changes her mind) For Seven hundred.

Kamala – My God! Seven hundred.

Sarita – why? Was it too little?

Kamala – (Pauses) it was an expensive bargain, memsahib.

If you pay seven hundred and there are no children.

Kamala – Memsahib, if you won't misunderstand, I'll tell you. The master bought you, he bought me, too. He spent a lot of money on the two of us. Didn't he? It isn't easy to earn money. A man has to labour like an ox to do it. So memsahib both of us must stay here together like sisters. We'll keep the master happy. We'll make him prosperous. The master will have children. I'll do the hard work, and I'll bring forth the children. I'll bring them up. You are educated woman. You keep the accounts and run the house. Put on lovely clothes and make merry with the master. Go out with him on holidays and feast-days." (Tendulkar 34-35)

Through this conversation between Sarita and Kamala Tendulkar has excellently expressed the condition of women in free India. This conversation brings a turning point in Sarita's life. Kamala's marginalized voice makes Sarita aware of her own marginalization by her husband at home. Illiterate Kamala teaches Sarita to speak and silent Sarita gets a voice from her. "Kamala is a signifier of exploitation. She is the catalyst who brings Sarita, the educated, intelligent wife of Jaisingh, to her existential crisis and precipitates the fall of Jaisingh" (Jain 93). When Kakasaheb says that Kamala is just a pawn in Jaisingh game of chess, awakened Sarita says,

"Not just Kamala, Kakasaheb. Not just Kamala, Kakasaheb, Me too.....me too." (Tendulkar 43).

With the dawn of new insight she comes to look upon marriage not as a holy union of two souls but as a bond of slavery. Through her experiences in married life she comes to know that she is treated in the house only as a useful object. When she finds that her condition is not much better than Kamala, she is hurt. She says,

"I was asleep. I was unconscious even when I was awake. Kamala woke me up. With a shock. Kamala showed me everything. Because of her, I suddenly saw things clearly. I saw that the man I thought my partner was the master of a slave. I have no rights at all in this house. Because I am a slave. Slaves don't have rights, do they, Kakasaheb? (Tendulkar 46)

We listen to Sarita's rebellious voice, when she says,

"Why? Why can't men limp behind? Why aren't women ever the masters? Why can't a woman at least ask to live her life the same way as a man? Why must only a man have right to be a man? Does he have one extra sense? A woman can do everything a man can." (Tendulkar 47)

Having realized at the end of the play that there is "no remedy to sexual politics in Marriage" (Millett 147), Sarita bursts forth:

"But a day will come, Kakasaheb, when I will stop being a slave. I'll no longer be an object to be used and thrown away. I'll do what I wish, and no one will rule over me. The day has to come. And I'll pay whatever price I have to pay for it." (Tendulkar 52)

Sarita does not leave her house at the end of the play because she thinks that Jaisingh, being deprived of his job, needs her support at the moment. She wants to support him out of human compassion. Yet, there is hope of her attaining freedom sometime in future. According to Shanta Gokhale,

"Sarita is a Nora who has stopped short of the final breaking out. Though she does not make a dramatic exit at the end of the play, however, she has understood her situation assuredly as Nora does." (41).

Kamalabai is another female character who is victimized by Jaisingh. She is a maidservant in Jaisingh's house. Like Kamala, Kamalabai also is doubly exploited as a woman and as a maidservant. Jaisingh does not show any respect to her as a human being. He speaks to her rudely and insults her. He proves himself a dominant master when he says to Kamalabai,

"How often I told you that once I've read the papers, you are to fold them and put them on the rack?" (Tendulkar 39).

When Jaisingh comes back leaving Kamala in the orphanage, Kamalabai asks him about tea or coffee. He says,

What's this you see in my hand? And why are you offering me tea or coffee? Go upstairs.....Stupid! (Tendulkar 43).

He does not care about her feelings. Even Sarita fails to understand that like Kamala and herself Kamalabai also is the victim of gender discrimination. She is economically dependent on Jaisingh. She doesn't like to live in Delhi because of hot weather. She says to Sarita,

"I want to go back to Phaltan. Buy my ticket." (Tendulkar 4).

But Sarita does not take it seriously. Kamalabai's voice is silenced by Jaisingh who treats her as an object.

### Conclusion:

The voices of all the three female characters in the play are silenced by male dominance. One important reason of their marginalization is their economic dependence on Jaisingh. The ruling ideology that favours men prompts these women to fall prey to the designs of men. Though Sarita shows the spirit to stand against patriarchy, being a typical Indian wife she is not able to leave her husband in his critical condition. The role of Kamala is small, but crucial in the play. It is only because of Kamala that Sarita becomes aware of her own marginalization. The play attacks the institution of marriage, which makes a woman almost a bonded slave owned by her spouse. Thus through the suppressed voices of female characters Tendulkar explores the marginalized position of women in contemporary Indian society.

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